

Lincoln p. 11.

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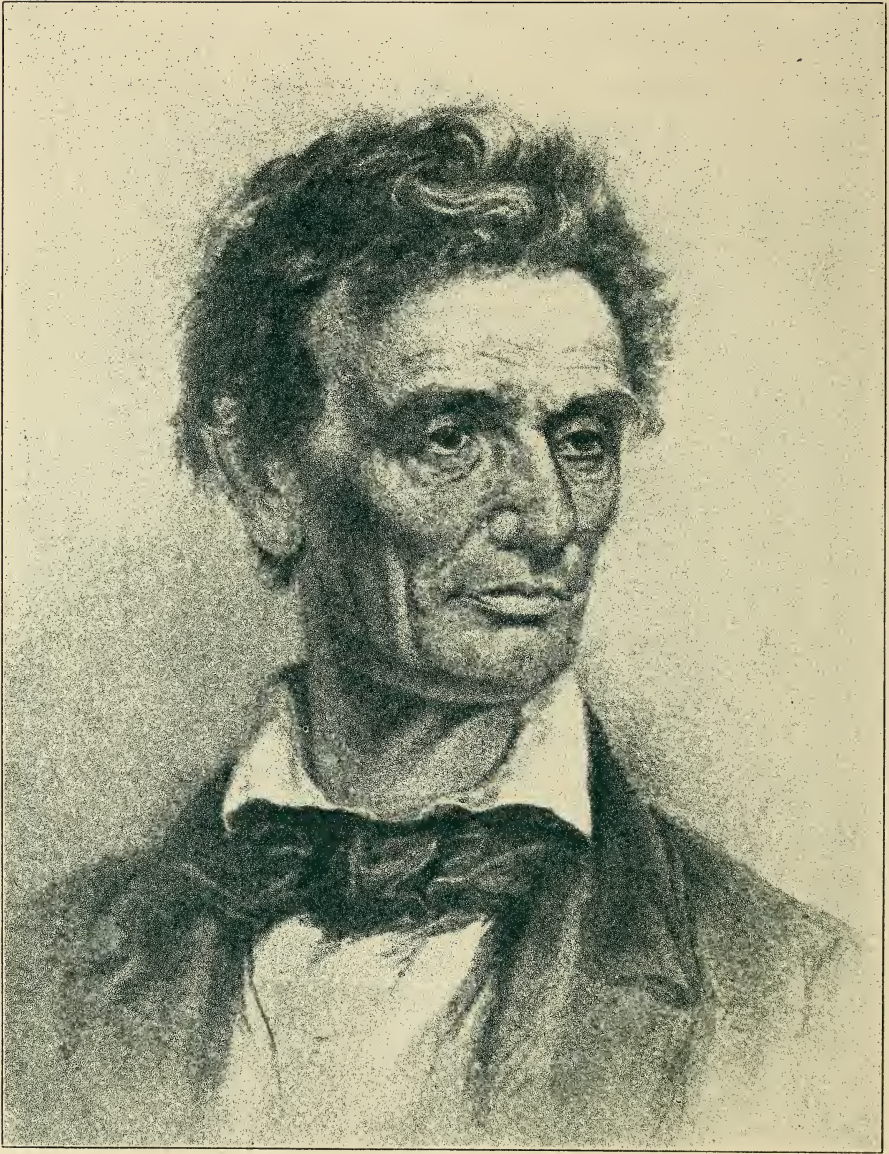
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Abraham Lincoln

Abraham Lincoln: A Personal Reminiscence

Marshall Solomon Snow, A.M., LL.D.,
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THE photograph on the opposite page is printed from a negative taken just before Mr. Lincoln left his home in 1861 to assume the office of President. I am informed that no copies of this were used until about a year ago. It seems that the intimate friends of Mr. Lincoln and, possibly, some members of his family, thought that the picture looked too much like that of a rough, unpolished man to appear as the likeness of the President of the United States. This picture is now in my study downstairs, and as I look at it daily I am continually reminded of an occasion before Mr. Lincoln was President when I, for the only time in my life, saw him and heard him speak.

About the first of March, 1860, Mr. Lincoln went to New York and there delivered in the Cooper Union a famous speech, which ranks among the best of his political addresses. His son, Robert, since then a man of distinction as Minister at the Court of St. James in England, and later as Secretary of War in this country, was then a student in the Senior class at Phillips' Academy, a famous preparatory school in the town of Exeter, New Hampshire, where I was then preparing for college.

After Mr. Lincoln's address in New York, perhaps to secure a few days of change and rest, he visited his son at Exeter. In those days the state and the local elections in New Hampshire were held in the spring; political feeling was then running high all over the country, and especially in the little state of New Hampshire. The Republican Club of Exeter arranged with Mr. Lincoln to speak upon the political issues of the day, and on Saturday evening, March third, Mr. Lincoln delivered in the Town Hall practically the same address which he had given a few days before in New York.

We boys in the Academy were greatly excited by the coming event. None of us thought of Mr. Lincoln then as a candidate for the presidency. We, who thought we were stalwart Republicans, were eager for

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Mr. Seward, who was regarded in New England as well as in some other parts of the country as the natural candidate for that office. We had, to be sure, heard much of Mr. Lincoln's famous debate with Judge Douglas, in the race for senatorship in Illinois two years before; but our greatest eagerness, after all, was to see the father of Robert Lincoln, "Bob," as we always called him. Bob Lincoln was a very popular young fellow, a gentleman in every sense of the word; quiet in manner, with a certain dignity of his own. He was a very good fellow, however, and always ready for any good time and clean fun. He was very popular with the girls of the town as well as with the boys. He was what would be called nowadays a "good dresser," and always looked as well as acted the part of the gentleman. So we wanted to see and hear the father of our friend.

On the night of the address we were all there, sitting together near the platform. The hall, which was a very large and handsome one for a village of only about twenty-five hundred inhabitants, and which would seat eight or nine hundred people, was filled early in the evening. Ladies as well as gentlemen were there, and both political parties were well represented. About eight o'clock Professor Wentworth, with



Office of the Dean of the College

whose exciting works on mathematics some of you are more or less familiar, at that time president of the Republican Club of the town, walked upon the platform followed by two strangers. One was Judge Underwood of Virginia, an ardent Republican, a great friend of Mr. Lincoln, and a man of large influence among the Union element of the old state of Virginia. He was very short and very stout; when he sat down upon the somewhat high chair which was reserved for him, his feet failed to touch the floor and hung rather helplessly. The other gentleman was Mr. Lincoln—tall, lank, awkward; dressed in a loose, ill-fitting black frock coat, with black trousers, ill-fitting and somewhat baggy at the knees. Mr. Lincoln also sat down in a chair reserved for him and, after some difficulty, succeeded in arranging his long legs under or about the chair. My eyes were all for Mr. Lincoln. I saw a man whose face impressed me as one of the most interesting as well as one of the saddest and most melancholy faces that I had ever seen. His hair was rumpled, his neckwear was all awry, he sat somewhat bent in the chair, and altogether presented a very remarkable and, to us, disappointing appearance.

Judge Underwood was introduced as the first speaker, and delivered, as I am told, a very able speech. I confess I heard none of it, nor did those of my friends who sat near me. We sat and stared at Mr. Lincoln. We whispered to each other, "Isn't it too bad Bob's father is so homely? Don't you feel sorry for him?" Our feelings were mingled ones of curious interest in the face of this melancholy looking man and of sympathy with our friend, his son.

At last, then, Judge Underwood concluded his speech and Mr. Lincoln was presented to us. He rose slowly, untangled those long legs from their contact with the rounds of the chair, drew himself up to his full height of six feet four inches, and began his speech. Not ten minutes had passed before his uncouth appearance was absolutely forgotten by us boys, and, I believe, by all of that large audience. For an hour and a half he held the closest attention of every person present. I cannot recall the details of his speech, which I afterwards read with great care, among his published addresses, but I remember how we were carried away with the arguments, with the style, and with the rapid change now and then from earnest, serious argument to something which in a humorous fashion would illustrate the point which he was endeavoring to make. His face lighted up and the man was changed; it seemed absolutely like another person speaking to us, from

the man who had sat upon his chair looking as if he hadn't a friend in the world. There was no more pity for our friend Bob; we were proud of his father, and when the exercises of the evening were over and the opportunity was offered for those who desired to meet Mr. Lincoln, we were the first to mount the platform and grasp him by the hand. I have always felt that this was one of the great privileges of my life. That evening fastened itself upon my memory in a most remarkable fashion.

The picture which I have in my possession is the man as I saw him then, and as I always remembered him afterwards, whether I thought of him in those days of sadness when he was listening to the reports of the battle-field and hearing of the loss of thousands of noble men, or when he was addressing sometimes crowds and sometimes but a few whom he was endeavoring to convince of his own sincerity and honesty in preserving the Union of the United States.

The growth of his beard after I saw him has always seemed to me to have lessened somewhat the apparent strength of the lower part of his face. I never think of him as a man with a beard, but as the man whose jaw was smooth and showed his strength of character, and whose eyes above were full of all the sympathy and love of the friend of his country. I saw that face before me as I saw it in 1860 when I read of his delivery of that matchless address at Gettysburg, which has become one of the classics of the English tongue. I can see it before me as I read that beautiful letter which he wrote to Mrs. Bixby of Boston, full of consolation for her in the loss of five sons in defense of the Union; a letter couched in such beauty and sincerity of expression as to make it worthy of being placed side by side with the Gettysburg address. In one of the colleges of Oxford University, in England, this letter has been placed, suitably framed, upon the wall of one of its rooms, deemed worthy of this high honor by the Oxford professors, for its dignity and beauty of sentiment and language.

I have tried to give you an impression made upon me when I was but a lad, of this man who was to be one of the great, the immortal men in this world's records. I do not think that I read into this feeling which I had for Mr. Lincoln's appearance and presence anything which has come to me in later years. That may be possible, but I do not think it is so. The Mr. Lincoln whom I now think of and whose centennial day we now celebrate is to me the sad, strong Lincoln whose picture stands upon the mantel in my study.

